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ABSTRACT

Findings of a study that examined parental reactions to the implementation of Minnesota's statewide open-enrollment program are presented in this paper. Data were derived from telephone interviews conducted with 162 parents at the end of the 1989-90 school year. A three-way multivariate research design with eight dependent variables was used to estimate differences in enrollment decision-making behavior, home-school relations, and awareness/opinions about school choice among participating and nonparticipating parents, white and nonwhite parents, and parents with varying levels of education. Findings indicate that: (1) parents are aware that open enrollment exists but are unaware of other enrollment options available in the state; (2) parents are "active" enrollment decision makers, regardless of whether they choose resident or nonresident schools; (3) parents participating in open enrollment have a greater degree of influence in relations with administrators; (4) parents choose nonresident schools because of dissatisfaction with their resident school's educational services and/or administration; and (5) parents who keep their children in resident schools do so because of overall satisfaction with the school, community affiliation, social reasons, and/or school location. Other factors related to parental choice include race, parental level of education, and open-enrollment participatory status. Twelve tables are included. Appendices offer descriptions of Minnesota enrollment options and of unrestricted and restricted choice plans. (Contains 50 references.) (LMI)

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Parent Choice Behavior Under Minnsota's Open Enrollment Program

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Parent Choice Behavior Under Minnesota's Open Enrollment Program

- ABSTRACT -

This paper presents the results of a study of parental reactions to the implementation of the statewide open enrollment program. One hundred sixty-two (162) parents were interviewed by telephone at the end of the 1989-90 school year. A 3-way multivariate research design with eight (8) dependent measurements was employed to estimate differences in enrollment decision-making behavior, home-school relations, and awareness/opinions about school choice between participating and nonparticipating parents, white and nonwhite parents, and parents with varying levels of education (high school; some college; college graduate).

The data from surveyed parents indicates: (1) parents are fully aware that open enrollment exists but were unaware of the other enrollment options available in Minnesota; (2) parents are "active" enrollment decision-makers, regardless of whether they choose resident or nonresident schools for their children; (3) parents have a greater degree of "influence" in their relations with school officials because of open enrollment; (4) parents who choose a nonresident school for their children do so because the are very dissatisfied with their resident school's educational services and/or administration (there was no evidence that parents were using open enrollment to avoid racial desegregation), and, (5) parents who choose to keep their children in the resident school do so because of: (a) overall satisfaction with school, (b) community affiliation/loyalty, (c) social reasons (children want to stay with friends), and/or (d) school location (convenient).

Parent level of education is closely related to enrollment decision-making behavior. Nonwhite parents are less satisfied with their resident school than white parents and prefer vouchers as a means of choice. Opinions regarding "restricted" and "unrestricted" choice was a function of open enrollment participatory status and race.

Parent Choice Behavior Under Minnesota's Open Enrollment Program

The topic of school choice has been on the national education agenda since the Alum Rock Voucher Demonstration Project was conducted over twenty years ago (Weiler, 1974; Jencks, 1970). Theorists, educational leaders, and legislators across the political spectrum have promoted a variety of plans which would provide parents with an effective means of choosing educational services for their children, yet few of these plans have been implemented, and those that have been are poorly understood.

One school choice plan which *has* made it into practice is open enrollment. Simply put, open enrollment programs offer parents an alternative to their resident public school. Parents are allowed to choose any public school within a metropolitan school district or an entire state school system. Districtwide open enrollment programs have been implemented in Cambridge, East Harlem, Minneapolis, Montclair, and San Francisco. Statewide programs have been enacted in Arkansas, Idaho, Hawaii, Iowa, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, and Utah. States that allow more limited interdistrict student transfers include: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Ohio, Oregon, and Washington. School choice legislation based on the open enrollment model is under consideration in Alaska, Illinois, Michigan, and North Dakota. Alternatively, Wisconsin and Vermont have been engaged in limited school choice practices which allow for state funding of tuition for students enrolled in private nonsectarian schools through the use of vouchers.

With nearly half of the country practicing or adopting some mechanism to allow parents to choose a public school for their children, open enrollment style choice will likely proliferate

in spite of new criticism that not enough is known about the effectiveness of statewide choice models (Carnegie, 1992).

As the Clinton administration begins to address its national education priorities, it is reasonable to assume that the "public schools of choice" approach to school reform and education consumerism will enjoy considerable support. It is likely that the education voucher model, most recently promoted by former President Bush, will again recede into our country's education policy past. Colorado voters recently defeated a proposed constitutional amendment to require all state money appropriated for the general support of elementary and secondary education be apportioned to students through vouchers (Education Commission of the States, 1992). A similar initiative in California was removed from the November 1992 ballot by the state supreme court due to a lack of validated signatures (Carnegie, 1992).

Proponents of school choice legislation, whether they support a restricted plan (which would allow parents to choose only among public schools) or an unrestricted plan (which would allow parents to choose among both public or private schools), offer a common argument for their proposals:

(1) Market competition will force schools to improve the quality of education programs and become more responsive to learner needs, thereby bolstering student achievement (Allen & Helsey, 1992; National Governors Association, 1991; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Fliegel, 1990; Levin, 1990).

(2) School choice will lead to a more decentralized delivery system for education services, creating more autonomy at the local school level (Clune, 1990; Moore, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1988; Fantini, 1970; Gittell, 1970).

(3) Parent and teacher participation in school planning and decision-making will increase, making schools more diverse, innovative, and flexible (Boyer, 1992; Driscoll, 1992; Glazer, 1992; Johnson, 1990; Nathan, 1987; Nathan, 1983; Coleman, Hoffer & Kilgore, 1982; Coons & Sugarman, 1978).

(4) School efficiency and accountability will increase, resulting in a more equitable distribution of educational resources (Bell Associates, 1988; Coleman, 1987; Chambers, 1981; Hirchman, 1970).

(5) Schools will become more ethnically and culturally diverse because parents will base their enrollment decisions on specific curriculum offerings or teaching methods, factors considered by parents of every race and national origin (U.S. Department of Education, 1992; Liberman, 1989).

Opponents of school choice have historically argued that:

(1) Market competition by itself will not increase student achievement nor accomplish school reform (Carnegie, 1992; Raywid, 1992; Sosnick & Ethington, 1992; Carr, 1991; Kolberg, 1991; Zimet, 1973).

(2) The inequities of an already imbalanced system of school finance will be exacerbated if parents choose only a few *good* schools for their children (Carnegie, 1992; Carr, 1991; Lewis, 1989; Glenn, 1982).

(3) Desegregation progress will be lost if parents choose schools for their children largely along racial and economic lines (Carnegie, 1992; Orfield; 1978)

(4) High income families will be better able than low income families to make choices and carry them out. Low income families may have difficulty providing transportation to schools outside their neighborhoods (Carnegie, 1992; Cohen, 1990; Levin, 1990; Merleman, 1990; Peterson, 1990; Weiss, 1990; Archibald, 1988).

(5) Parents are not knowledgeable enough about educational services to make good decisions for their children and will likely be fooled by false advertising campaigns into choosing particular schools, or will make their enrollment decisions based solely on convenience factors (Carnegie, 1992; Clewell & Joy,1990; Finch, 1989; Bridge & Blackman, 1978).

It would not be appropriate to review all of the arguments and counter-arguments in the school choice debate, but it is important to identify some of the issues at stake in the search for meaningful answers to policy questions regarding existing programs. What is clear from this debate is that a system-wide change is occurring, redefining the way schools are organized and administered, and that the relationship between parents and school officials has

already been substantially altered. How parents choose to utilize their newly acquired school choice opportunity was of primary interest to this researcher.

PARENT STUDY

This paper summarizes the results of a telephone survey conducted among Minnesota parents to determine their reactions to open enrollment while the program was still in its initiation phase. The study focused on parental responsiveness to this program, but it also explored the degree of parental awareness related to the other features of Minnesota's *Enrollment Options* program. In addition to offering parents an opportunity to choose any public school within the state, Minnesota parents have the option of enrolling their children in any one of a number of "area learning centers". Parents of 11th and 12th grade students may elect to send their learners to college classes under the "post secondary enrollment option". Special provisions have also been made for students considered "at risk" of school drop-out through the "high school graduation incentives program" and the "pregnant minor/minor parent program". A more detailed description of each one of Minnesota's enrollment options is provided in Appendix A.

In spite of all the educational options offered to Minnesota parents regarding the schooling of their children, only a very few parents actually enroll their children in these programs. During the year the present study was conducted (1989-90), less than one percent of Minnesota school children were involved in open enrollment. The participation level has since risen to 1.8% of the total student enrollment for the state, but it remains unclear why more parents are not exercising their option to choose a public school for their children. The researcher was concerned about this seemingly low participation rate and developed a set of measurements to determine if parents are either (1) unaware of open enrollment, or (2) unmotivated to participate

in open enrollment. This latter circumstance required an examination of parent level of satisfaction with the resident school, the difficulties related to enrolling children in nonresident schools, and how "active" parents are in making the enrollment decisions for their children. It seemed apparent at the outset of this research effort that determining why parents don't choose to enroll their children in nonresident schools was at least as important as determining why they do.

In addition to studying parent choice behavior in relation to open enrollment, the researcher was interested in assessing public opinion regarding all types of school choice plans by using a sample of parents already familiar with a model in practice. Further, an examination of the change in relationship between parents and school officials as a result of open enrollment also merited study.

Before discussing the details of this investigation, this researcher presents a brief review of the chronology of events leading up to the statewide open enrollment program in Minnesota. During the 1980's, the Minneapolis/St. Paul school systems practiced a form of open enrollment as a means to bolster desegregation efforts. The program was so successful that, in 1987, the state legislature authorized a voluntary open enrollment plan. Approximately 35% of the state's school districts immediately declared themselves open for student transfers. In 1988, Minnesota lawmakers made open enrollment mandatory for all school districts but allowed two years for full implementation. Beginning in the 1989-90 school year, all school districts with enrollments of over one thousand students were required to participate in the program. By the 1990-91 school year, all school districts in Minnesota were open for interdistrict student transfers.

A multi-scaled questionnaire was used to conduct a series of telephone interviews among

parents who were participating in open enrollment and among those who were not, with the goal of obtaining answers to the following research questions:

(1) Do parents fully understand all of the school choice options available to them under the state's *Enrollment Options* program?

(2) How "active" are parents in making the enrollment decisions for their children?[1]

(3) What impediments are faced when enrolling a child in a nonresident school?

(4) What level of satisfaction exists among parents regarding the educational services provided by their resident school? How does this level of satisfaction differ among participating and nonparticipating parents?

(5) Has the status of parents as educational decision-makers been raised through the open enrollment program, by affording them a greater degree of "influence" in their relations with school officials?

(6) What level of interest exists among parents regarding other *restricted* choice plans which are limited to public schools (minischools; magnet schools; and, choice-of-teacher programs), versus *unrestricted* plans which allow parents to choose among public and private schools (educational vouchers; tuition tax credits; and, tuition tax deductions)? Refer to Appendix B for the descriptions of restricted and unrestricted plans presented to parents in the survey.

METHOD

A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) model was selected as the primary method to statistically analyze parent survey data. Eight (8) dependent measurements (survey scales) were developed from each of the study's research questions and experimental hypotheses.[2]

INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Three independent variables were used in the present study: GROUP (participating; nonparticipating), RACE (white; nonwhite), and parent level of EDUCATION (non-high school graduate (NHS); high school graduate (HS); some college (SC); and, college graduate (CG)).

The GROUP variable was selected to determine how parents participating in open

enrollment differed from those not participating in the program on a variety of dependent measurements. The inclusion of RACE as an independent variable was considered important for two reasons: (1) no other research on open enrollment in Minnesota accounted for race effects; and (2) race has been found to be a reliable predictor of parental school choice behavior in previous studies. Nonwhite parents have typically shown a lower propensity to use choice programs than white parents, even though many of these programs were developed specifically to provide minority families with greater access to quality educational services (Darling-Hammond & Kirby, 1985; Williams, 1983; Nault & Uchitelle, 1982; Kamin & Erikson, 1981; Cogan, 1979; Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Weiler, 1974). Parent level of EDUCATION was also selected based on the findings of the research cited, which has shown that the more educated parents are, the more likely it is that they will take advantage of the choice options available to them.

SAMPLE

Potential parent subjects were classified by GROUP, RACE, and EDUCATION characteristics, as well as RESIDENCY factors (rural; suburban; and, urban), which resulted in a 48 cell sampling frame (2x2x4x3). The sampling method for participating and nonparticipating groups were different, but it insured that near equal numbers of subjects were selected from each cell. Twelve (12) subjects were randomly selected from each cell, providing 36 potential subjects for each one of the 16 groups to be used in the study. The first 12 subjects selected in each group were scheduled for interviews, and the remaining 24 subjects were available as alternates if difficulties were encountered in conducting those interviews.

Subjects selected for the *participating* group were drawn from more than 3,800 open

enrollment parent applications maintained by the Minnesota Department of Education. These parent application files did not contain any information regarding parent level of education, which had to be determined by proxy[3]. The use of the proxy method resulted in 68% probability of correctly classifying each potential parent subject to the four (4) education cohorts specified in the research design. After assigning all potential subjects by education cohort, equal numbers of white and nonwhite subjects living in rural, suburban, and urban areas were randomly selected from each of these cohorts until a sufficient number of parents for the participating group was obtained (288).

Subjects for the *nonparticipating* group were selected in a different fashion. Since the Minnesota Department of Education does not maintain any records on parents who are not participating in open enrollment, an alternative method of generating a sampling frame of potential subjects had to be devised. This was accomplished through the efforts employed in the companion research to the present investigation: a school administrator study (Tenbusch & Garet, 1993). A sufficient quantity of nonparticipating subjects were acquired from the "parent data forms" which accompanied the open enrollment survey instrument mailed to 192 Minnesota school principals. These forms asked respondent principals to randomly select one parent *not participating* in open enrollment for each of the eight (8) cells needed for the nonparticipating group[4]. Classification of parent subjects by RESIDENCY factors was accomplished by way of the school administrator study's design, which used a GEOGRAPHIC location variable (rural; suburban; and, urban) for selecting a sample of Minnesota schools that were either participating or not participating in open enrollment. The names and phone numbers of 428 nonparticipating parents were gathered via the parent data forms collected from school administrators. Of this

total, 288 subjects were randomly selected to be interviewed or used as alternates in the present study.

Parents from 75% of Minnesota counties were represented in the sample. The demographic statistics displayed in Table 1 demonstrate that the study groups were essentially equivalent by socio-economic factors.

PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH THE SAMPLE

A source of sampling error was discovered when subjects were asked to report their level of education during the interview. Most of the parents expected to belong to the non-high school graduate cohort prior to conducting the survey indicated during their interviews that they had graduated from high school. Two factors may have contributed to this error: (1) the sampling method was not sensitive enough to identify subjects with less than a high school education (even though a high accuracy rate was observed for the selection of subjects to the other three education cohorts); and, (2) parents subjects who in reality may have dropped out of school before completing the 12th grade were simply unwilling to admit this fact to the researcher. Regardless of the reason for this sampling error, the required number of subjects (48) for the non-high school graduate cohort could not be obtained. Hence, the non-high school graduate groups were combined with the high school graduate groups to form the lowest parent education level cohort, resulting in a 2x2x3 research design, instead of the 2x2x4 design originally planned. This reduced the number of study groups from sixteen (16) to twelve (12).

A total of 162 parent subjects were interviewed during the period of June 1st to August 31st, 1990; average duration of each interview was 31 minutes. Table 2 provides a breakdown of pertinent response rate data for the sample.

TABLE 1: PARENT SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS	PARTICIPATING						NONPARTICIPATING					
	WHITE			NONWHITE			WHITE			NONWHITE		
	HS	SC	CG	HS	SC	CG	HS	SC	CG	HS	SC	CG
1. MARITAL STATUS												
a. Single Parents	8	*21*	0	17	*25*	19	0	*0*	0	21	*25*	21
b. Nonsingle Parents	92	*79*	100	83	*75*	81	100	*100*	100	79	*75*	79
2. ENROLLMENT DECISION MAKER												
a. Mothers	31	*29*	25	17	*67*	25	38	*15*	0	29	*42*	21
b. Fathers	0	*0*	0	0	*0*	0	0	*0*	0	21	*8*	14
c. Both Parents	69	*71*	75	83	*33*	75	62	*85*	100	50	*50*	65
3. ETHNICITY												
a. White	100	*100*	100	0	*0*	0	100	*100*	100	0	*0*	0
b. Black	0	*0*	0	8	*17*	19	0	*0*	0	29	*67*	50
c. Hispanic	0	*0*	0	42	*50*	13	0	*0*	0	29	*17*	14
d. Asian	0	*0*	0	17	*17*	38	0	*0*	0	14	*8*	21
e. American Indian	0	*0*	0	33	*16*	30	0	*0*	0	21	*8*	15
f. Pacific Islander	0	*0*	0	0	*0*	0	0	*0*	0	7	*0*	0
4. INCOME INFORMATION												
a. Below 10,000	8	*0*	0	8	*0*	0	15	*0*	0	0	*8*	7
b. 10,000 - 20,000	0	*0*	0	17	*17*	13	23	*0*	0	50	*33*	0
c. 20,000 - 30,000	23	*36*	7	8	*25*	6	31	*31*	7	36	*0*	7
d. 30,000 - 40,000	15	*14*	13	25	*17*	38	23	*46*	43	14	*33*	7
e. 40,000 - 50,000	23	*29*	27	8	*17*	13	0	*0*	21	0	*8*	0
f. Over 50,000	15	*21*	40	25	*17*	30	8	*15*	21	0	*0*	64
g. No Data	16	*0*	13	9	*7*	0	0	*8*	8	0	*18*	15
5. MEAN LEVEL OF EDUCATION	12.0	*13.6*	16.8	11.7	*13.3*	16.7	11.7	*13.3*	16.3	10.4	*13.6*	17.2

Tabled values indicate the percent of total for each cell (except item 5).

Table 2: Parent Survey Response Rate Statistics

	Participating	Nonparticipating
PARENT INTERVIEWS: SUMMARY		
Unsuccessful Attempts:	95	71
Successful Attempts:	82	80
Total Number of Attempts:	177	151
INTERVIEW SUCCESS RATE:	46%	53%
UNSUCCESSFUL ATTEMPTS: DETAIL		
Wrong Number:	27	12
Phone Disconnected:	14	13
Could Not Reach:	27	22
Declined Interview:	13	20
Misclassified:	14	4
MEAN DURATION OF INTERVIEW:	32.6 min.	30.8 min.

SURVEY

Multiple-item summative scales were developed for each of the study's research questions and related experimental hypotheses. One hundred forty-four items (drawn from 46 questions) were used in coding the survey. Brief descriptions of each of the eight (8) dependent measurements used in this investigation are provided in Table 3. The inter-item reliability of the survey scales ranged from .73 to .86 (standardized alpha), demonstrating that the test for internal consistency of scale items was within accepted standards of practice for survey research (Berdie & Anderson, 1974; Babbie, 1973; Moser & Kalton, 1971; Oppenheim, 1966; Scott, 1961). One half the number of survey scales used exclusively discrete type items (coded as 0 or 1), while the remaining half used some number of Guttman type items (coded as -1, 0, or +1). The raw

scores for each survey scales were transformed into an interval measurement and then calibrated from either zero to 100 (discrete items), or calibrated from a number less than zero to 100 (Guttman items)[5]. The scores on each scale have been interpreted to represent the proportion of potential responses associated with the open enrollment phenomenon under investigation.

Table 3: Description of Dependent Measurements

Scale Type	Range	Description
Choice Awareness	0 - 100	- estimate of respondent's level of awareness of regarding Minnesota's Enrollment Options program (includes six (6) distinct programs). - estimate of respondent's level of technical knowledge regarding each enrollment option. - determine the number and type of sources of information used by respondents in becoming aware/ knowledgeable of enrollment options. - determine the number and type of problems encountered by respondents in acquiring information; whether information received was adequate; and, whether assistance (counseling) was requested.
Active Choice	0 - 100	- estimate of respondent's level of deliberation regarding ten (10) enrollment decision-making factors (included academic and convenience items). - estimate of respondent's propensity to compare/visit schools before making enrollment decision. - level of respondent interest in choosing a school for their children versus school officials making the enrollment decision.
Nonactive Choice	0 - 100	- estimate of respondent's passive or uninterested response to school choice and enrollment decision-making based on the frequency of "no opinion" responses to survey questions.

Table 3: Description of Dependent Measurements (Continued)

Scale Type	Range	Description
Impediment To Choice Of Nonresident School	0 - 100	- estimate of respondent's propensity to *not* choose a nonresident school for their children. - determine the amount of influence "community affiliation/loyalty" has on respondent's enrollment decision-making behavior. - determine how important a variety of "convenience factors" are in relation to respondent's enrollment decision-making behavior.
Satisfaction With Resident School	-100 - 100	- estimate of respondent's level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction associated with fourteen (14) qualitative resident school factors.
Parent Influence	-40 - 100	- estimate of respondent school's responsiveness or unresponsiveness associated with ten (10) qualitative parent-school relation factors. - determine how parent influence in school management has changed in relation to open enrollment. - determine how parent influence in negotiations with school officials regarding the provision of student specific education services has changed in relation to open enrollment.
Restricted Choice	-50 - 100	- estimate the level of respondent approval or disapproval for school choice plans limited to public schools (plans reviewed included: magnet schools, minischools, and choice-of-teacher programs). - determine respondent's propensity to select a restricted choice plan as their "most favored."
Unrestricted Choice	-50 - 100	- estimate the level of respondent approval or disapproval for school choice plans which allow parents to choose among public and private schools (plans reviewed included: tuition tax deductions, tuition tax credits, and educational vouchers). - determine respondent's propensity to select a unrestricted choice plan as their "most favored."

RESULTS

The MANOVA results for the GROUP x RACE x EDUCATION model[6] is presented in Table 5. Only main effect differences were detected in this model, which are graphically displayed in Figures 1 to 3. The researcher judged the effect size of statistically significant results based on the *pooled within cells standard deviations* for each scale, using the criteria listed in Table 4. The results for each scale are reviewed in turn below.

Table 4: Criteria For Determining Effect Size of Significant Results

Effect Size Range	Interpreted As:
0.00 - 0.25	Low
0.25 - 0.50	Low-Moderate
0.50 - 0.75	Moderate
0.75 - 1.00	Moderately-High
1.00 - 1.50	High
1.50+	Very High

SCALE SPECIFIC FINDINGS

Choice Awareness Scale

The results indicate that parent participatory status (GROUP) had a low-moderate effect on their awareness of enrollment options. Participating parents outscored their nonparticipating counterparts on 67% of scale items; participating subjects were better informed than nonparticipating subjects about the various features of the Enrollment Options program and possessed a greater technical knowledge of each feature. Table 6 provides a delineation of the sources of information used by each group. Participating parents obtained their information about enrollment options from more sources than nonparticipating parents and relied on *primary* sources of information. Nonparticipating parents used mostly *secondary* sources of information.

TABLE 1: 3-WAY MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: GROUP x RACE x EDUCATION
Mean Scaled Scores By Group, Statisitical Tests & Reliability Measurements

STUDY GROUP SCALE RANGE		CA 0-100	AC 0-100	NA 0-100	IC 0-100	SR -100-100	PI -40-100	RC -50-100	UC -50-100
WHITE	n				**PARTICIPATING (N=82)**				
H.S./H.S. GRADUATE	(13)	35.4	65.9	17.2	24.5	-8.5	62.0	30.8	42.3
SOME COLLEGE	(14)	39.4	66.8	13.6	15.0	20.4	56.0	50.0	41.7
COLLEGE GRADUATE	(15)	45.2	75.2	8.9	18.8	-4.0	66.0	67.8	51.1
NONWHITE									
H.S./H.S. GRADUATE	(12)	33.5	72.2	12.3	26.5	-31.3	70.0	77.8	34.7
SOME COLLEGE	(12)	39.0	73.2	17.5	14.4	-24.6	56.7	32.0	55.6
COLLEGE GRADUATE	(16)	41.3	76.0	9.2	16.0	-13.4	56.2	58.3	47.9
WHITE					**NONPARTICIPATING (N=80)**				
H.S./H.S. GRADUATE	(13)	24.2	55.0	33.3	35.7	53.8	37.7	21.8	79.5
SOME COLLEGE	(13)	37.3	55.2	29.3	46.9	48.1	49.2	27.0	70.5
COLLEGE GRADUATE	(14)	51.1	54.5	30.0	40.2	60.4	52.1	19.0	82.1
NONWHITE									
H.S./H.S. GRADUATE	(14)	16.1	40.8	46.3	44.8	41.4	32.5	39.3	50.0
SOME COLLEGE	(12)	31.3	60.5	29.0	50.0	48.3	37.9	47.2	63.9
COLLEGE GRADUATE	(14)	40.5	65.4	25.2	46.8	45.4	49.3	39.3	59.5
STANDARD DEVIATION		17.4	20.8	16.9	22.5	48.3	26.0	44.1	37.0
EFFECT	**MULTIV**				**UNIVARIATE**				
GRP x RACE x EDUC	.451	.991	.099	.044	.924	.203	.477	.082	.996
RACE x EDUCATION	.661	.806	.299	.456	.815	.779	.672	.124	.258
GROUP x EDUCATION	.189	.018	.472	.092	.037	.500	.062	.172	.857
GROUP x RACE	.410	.212	.512	.495	.257	.160	.431	.333	.067
EDUCATION	.000	.000	.036	.002	.792	.391	.367	.676	.431
RACE	.020	.034	.386	.571	.327	.004	.379	.052	.099
GROUP	.000	.023	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.002	.000
					RELIABILITY				
STANDARDIZED ALPHA		.8429	.8414	.8153	.7423	.8611	.8372	.7267	.7302

CA - CHOICE AWARENESS
AC - ACTIVE CHOICE
NA - NONACTIVE CHOICE
IC - IMPEDIMENTS TO CHOICE OF NONRESIDENT SCHOOL
SR - SATISFACTION WITH RESIDENT SCHOOL
PI - PARENT INFLUENCE
RC - RESTRICTED CHOICE
UC - UNRESTRICTED CHOICE

Figure 1: Open Enrollment Group Effects

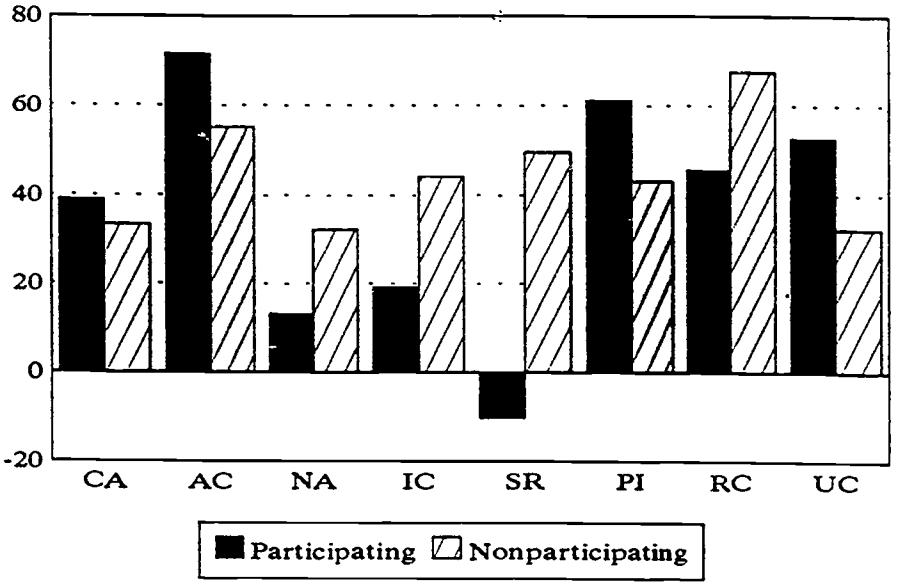
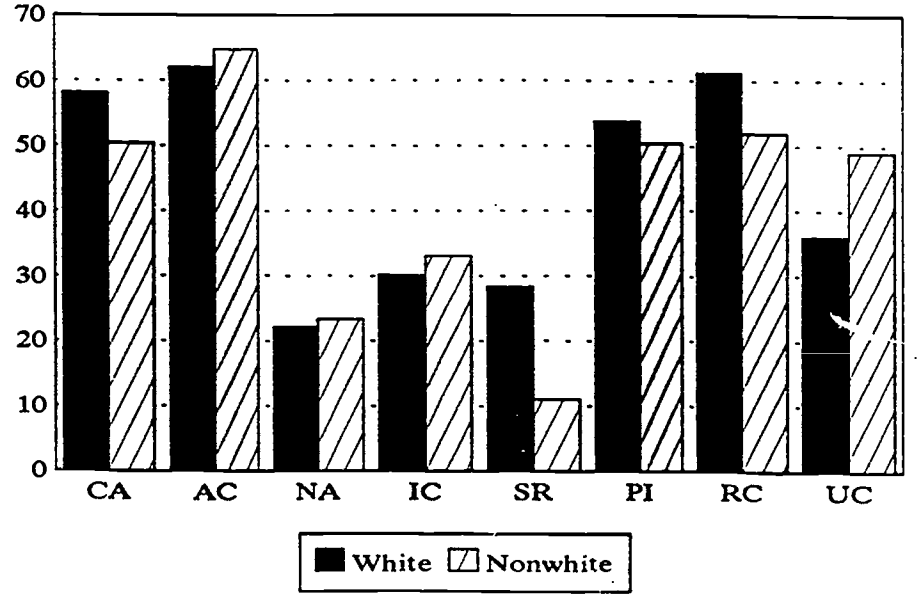
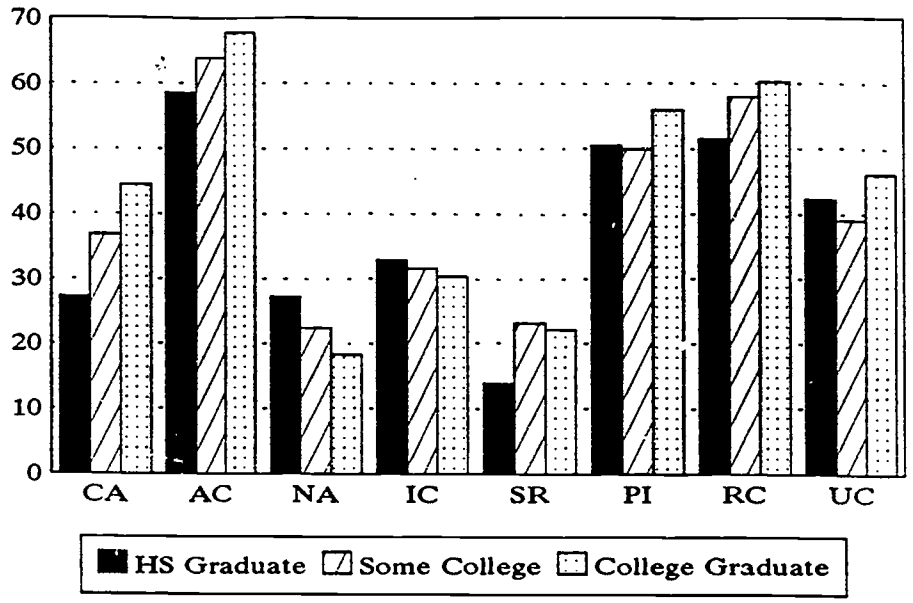


Figure 2: Open Enrollment Race Effects



CA - Choice Awareness
AC - Active Choice
NA - Nonactive Choice
IC - Impediments To Choice Of NRS
SR - Satisfaction With RS
PI - Parent Influence
RC - Ristricted Choice
UC - Unrestricted Choice

Figure 3: Open Enrollment Education Effects



CA - Choice Awareness
AC - Active Choice
NA - Nonactive Choice
IC - Impediments To Choice Of NRS
SR - Satisfaction With RS
PI - Parent Influence
RC - Ristricted Choice
UC - Unrestricted Choice

Table 6: Sources of Information Regarding Enrollment Options

Participating	Nonparticipating	No Difference
- school newsletter/paper	- child(ren)	- television
- school brochure/flier	- spouse	- radio
- state publication	- another parent(s)	- magazine
- public meeting	- priest/rabbi/minister	- social service agency
- local newspaper	- employer	- community organization
- teacher		- other family member or or relative
- counselor/social worker		
- principal/other school administrator		
- friend/neighbor		
- university/college		
- church/synagogue		

RACE differences were found to have a moderate effect on choice awareness. White parents outscored their nonwhite counterparts on 74% of scale items. White parents displayed a generally higher level of awareness/knowledge of their enrollment options and used more sources of information than nonwhite parents. However, nonwhite parents expressed a greater interest than white parents in receiving assistance (counseling) in making their enrollment decisions.

EDUCATION differences were found to have a moderate effect on choice awareness, demonstrating that the more educated parents are, the greater their awareness/technical knowledge of enrollment options. Parents from the "some college" cohort outscored parents from the "high school" cohort on 76% of scale items; parents from the "college graduate" cohort outscored parents from the "some college" cohort on 78% of scale items.

Parents displaying the highest choice awareness scale scores consistently reported that acquiring information regarding open enrollment, or any other enrollment option, was not an easy task. Resident school administrators were reported to be generally uncooperative with parents in making information available to them, and quite frequently the information that was received was "confusing and contradictory". It appears that persistence in acquiring information about open enrollment was a common attribute among all parents, whether they choose to take advantage of this option or not.

The low participation rate in the open enrollment program does not reflect any parental ignorance of the program. In fact, close to 100% of the parents interviewed from all groups understood the basic features of open enrollment. Awareness of the other enrollment options in Minnesota is another matter. Only about 50% of parents within the sample were aware of the

"post secondary enrollment option" and "area learning centers." Less than half of the parents interviewed knew anything about the "high school graduation incentives" program or the "minor parent/pregnant minor" programs.

Active Choice Scale

A moderately-high GROUP effect was detected on the active choice scale. Participating parents consistently engaged in a more thoughtful and deliberative process in making their enrollment decisions than did nonparticipating parents (as indicated by 74% of scale items). However, the scale scores for both groups were well above 50, indicating that sample parents were, in general, moderately active in making the enrollment decisions for their learners. Table 7 provides a breakdown of the most important enrollment decision-making factors by group. This table identifies a general trend contributing to the large difference observed between the two groups: participating parents made their enrollment decisions based primarily on school related or *academic* factors (resulting in higher scale scores),[7] while nonparticipating parents appeared to be more concerned about nonacademic or *convenience* factors. Participating subjects were two times more likely than nonparticipating subjects to have compared schools before making their enrollment decision, and were more than three times as likely to have visited some of those schools. However, many participating parents reported that they had compared schools before open enrollment program began, and had previously considered private school enrollment. Nonparticipating parents also considered academic factors before making their enrollment decisions; but as a group, they simply did not rate these factors as highly as participating subjects. Additional insights into the GROUP differences observed can be found in the rank ordered listing of *other* enrollment decision-making factors displayed in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 7: Most Important Enrollment Decision-Making Factors

Participating	Nonparticipating	No Difference
- curriculum	- school location	- disciplinary approach
- ethnic/cultural student composition	- availability of transportation	
- moral/ethical philosophy	- extracurricular programs (includes childcare)	
- quality of teachers	- other nonacademic factors	
- amount of control over child's educational program		
- other academic factors		

Table 8: Other Enrollment Decision-Making Factors: Participating Group

- nonresident school meets child's education needs the best.
- overall school quality of nonresident school.
- nonresident school's academic standards and curriculum (course specific)
- amount of individual attention offered to child at nonresident school.
- quality of nonresident school's teaching staff.
- wanted a small school environment for child.
- wanted to leave a bad school environment
- afterschool programs available at nonresident school (includes childcare)

Table 9: Other Enrollment Decision-Making Factors: Nonparticipating Group

- resident school is more conveniently located.
- stayed at resident school due to community loyalty.
- child stayed at resident school to be with their friends.
- didn't know I had a choice.
- there would have been transportation problems to the nonresident school.
- haven't though about nonresident school enrollment.
- family tradition to attend resident school.
- good relations with resident school teachers and administrators.

A low to moderate EDUCATION effect was detected on the active choice scale, demonstrating that the better educated parents within the sample considered mostly academic

factors before making their enrollment decisions. However, given the small effect size between education cohorts, it seems that most parents, regardless of how educated they are, considered essentially the same factors before making their enrollment decision. One important difference worth mentioning is that parents with the lowest level of education (HS cohort) were the most likely to indicate that their enrollment decisions were primarily based on convenience/school location factors. Since family income seems to be positively correlated with parent level of education (see Table 1), it is not surprising that parents who are poorly educated would be the most concerned about the practical and economic implications related to a school choice.

Nonactive Choice Scale

A high GROUP effect difference was detected on the active choice scale: nonparticipating parents outscored participating parents on 93% of scale items. Both groups, however, displayed scores in the low to low-moderate range (with the exception of the NP-NW-HS group). Because this scale measures the frequency of "no opinion" responses to a series of school choice and enrollment decision-making questions, the generally low scores observed for all subjects within the sample suggests that most Minnesota parents have definite convictions regarding school choice issues. The low participation rate in open enrollment does not reflect a generally passive or uninterested response by parents to the program. On the contrary, the majority of nonparticipating parents surveyed indicated that they had fully considered the prospects of using open enrollment for their children.

The low-moderate EDUCATION effect detected demonstrates that a negative correlation exists between parent level of education and nonactive choice behavior. Poorly educated parents offered the highest frequency of "no opinion" responses to survey questions (most notably among

the HS cohorts).

Impediments To Choice of Nonresident School Scale

A high GROUP effect was detected on the impediments to choice of nonresident school scale: nonparticipating parents outscored participating parents on 100% of scale items. In many instances, the item scores observed for nonparticipating subjects were double to triple the values observed for participating subjects. Two factors appear to have contributed to the very large difference in scale scores between the two groups: (1) family choice of residence and (2) the practical issues involved in making a school choice. Nonparticipating-white parents were two to three times more likely than participating-white parents to report that they had moved to their community of residence partly because of the quality of schools available. Nonparticipating-nonwhite subjects were four to six times as likely as their participating counterparts to indicate that they had chosen their current residence with the "school quality" factor in mind. This finding suggests that nonparticipating parents are heavily influenced by a "neighborhood effect," where community affiliation/loyalty makes it very difficult for them to choose a nonresident school for their children. As the nonparticipating sample of parents is believed to represent the majority of Minnesota parents, it appears that most parents had already *chosen with their feet* regarding schooling for their children by moving to communities believed to have good schools.

School accessibility was also found to be an important factor considered by parents before they made their enrollment decision. Approximately 60% of nonparticipating parents stated that the nonresident schools were "located too far away to be convenient," and among the nonparticipating-nonwhite subjects this response was even more prevalent (83%).

The presence of strong *neighborhood* and *convenience* effects were found to be effective

impediments to nonresident school enrollment. This may explain why the majority of parents have thus far chosen not to use open enrollment. Curiously, the HS cohort within the participating group were found to be quite heavily impacted by convenience impediments, but still chose to enroll their children in nonresident schools.

Participating and nonparticipating parents displayed a similar pattern of responses to impediment factors by ranking "transportation problems, negative impact on child's social life, and feelings of community affiliation/loyalty" among the uppermost reasons for *not* choosing a nonresident school for their children. However, nonparticipating subjects rated these factors twice as highly as participating subjects.

Satisfaction With Resident School Scale

A very-high GROUP effect was detected on the satisfaction with resident school scale, indicating that nonparticipating parents were substantially more pleased with the educational services and programs offered by their resident school than participating parents. Nonparticipating subjects displayed a higher frequency of "satisfied" ratings than participating subjects on 100% of scale items. Conversely, participating parents indicated a higher frequency of "not satisfied" responses than nonparticipating parents on 93% of scale items.

Participating and nonparticipating parents provided a similar ordering of resident school factors they were satisfied with, including: school's physical environment, extracurricular programs, school's social environment, level of achievement child is able to attain, and parent involvement in decision making. It should be noted, however, that in spite of this similarity in the ordering of items, the nonparticipating group displayed ratings which were consistently double those of participating parents.

Participating and nonparticipating parents also provided a common ranking of resident school factors they were not satisfied with, including: academic standards, teaching staff, disciplinary practices, and other programs and services which help students to succeed. Again, the frequency of "not satisfied" ratings for these items were substantially higher for participating subjects than those of nonparticipating subjects. An important difference between the two groups was displayed on the ratings of two items: (1) amount of individual attention offered to child; and, (2) resident school's administration. Participating parents reported that they were *very* dissatisfied with these two factors.

During the interview, parents were asked to identify any other factors related to their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the resident school which might have affected their enrollment decision. The four most frequent responses from the participating group included: not satisfied with the quality of education; not satisfied with the school's administration; not satisfied with the school's social environment; and, resident school was located too far away to be convenient. Among the nonparticipating group, the four most frequent responses were: satisfied with the quality of education services provided by resident school; resident school is conveniently located; satisfied with the resident school's social environment; and, transportation to a nonresident school would have been a problem.

A low-moderate RACE effect was detected on the satisfaction with resident school scale, with white parents displaying a higher frequency of "satisfied" responses than nonwhite subjects on 73% of scale items. Conversely, nonwhite parents indicated a higher frequency of "not satisfied" responses than white parents on 66% of scale items. White parents displayed a consistently higher frequency of "satisfied" ratings than nonwhite parents on the following

resident school factors: academic standards, teaching staff, school administration, disciplinary practices, amount of individual attention offered to child, and other programs and services which help students to succeed. Nonwhite parents displayed a consistently higher frequency of "not satisfied" ratings than white parents on the following factors: ethnic/cultural student composition, other programs and services which help student to succeed, amount of individual attention offered to child, level of achievement child is able to attain, school's social environment, and parent involvement in decision-making. However, nonwhite subjects were quite satisfied with the resident school's counseling staff.

Based on the analysis of satisfaction with resident school scale scores, this researcher has determined that dissatisfaction with the educational services and programs offered by the resident school is the primary reason why parents choose to use the open enrollment program.

Parent Influence Scale

A moderate GROUP effect was detected on the parent influence scale: participating subjects outscored nonparticipating subjects on 80% of scale items. Participating parents displayed a consistently higher frequency of "responsive" ratings than did nonparticipating subjects to a series of school-parent relation items. The largest difference in item scores was observed in "meeting child's instructional needs". This finding is very consistent with the information obtained on the previous scale. Participating parents left their resident school because they did not feel that they had enough control over determining their child's educational program. Participating parents reported that they had substantially more influence with the school staff at the nonresident school than with the staff at their resident school, particularly in negotiations for the provision of specific educational services.

Large differences between the two groups were also observed in subject ratings of (1) parent influence in school affairs, and (2) PTA influence in school affairs. For both items, participating parents were twice as likely as nonparticipating parents to indicate a "very responsive" rating. An even larger difference was observed in response to the question: *Have you noticed any change in your influence as a parent at your current school which you think might be linked to the fact that parents now have a choice of schools?* Participating subjects were three times more likely than nonparticipating subjects to answer "yes" to this question.

The changes in parent influence due to open enrollment most frequently mentioned for both groups is provided in Table 10. Although participating and nonparticipating parents offered a very similar list of change factors in their relations with school officials, the participating parents reported these factors at three times the frequency observed among nonparticipating parents. Curiously, nonparticipating subjects indicated that they had become slightly more active than participating parents in PTA since the open enrollment program began.

Table 10: Parent Influence Change Factors

Participating	Nonparticipating
- school more responsive to parents.	- school more responsive to parents.
- school administration recognizes parent decision-making power.	- school administration recognized parent decision-making power.
- school pays more attention to child's educational needs.	- school administration more accommodating to get students to stay.
- more parent involvement in school planning/programming.	- more parent involvement in school planning/programming.
- school administration more accommodating to get students to stay.	- school pays more attention to child's educational needs.

Restricted Choice Scale

A low GROUP effect was detected on the restricted choice scale, indicating that nonparticipating parents were slightly more in favor of choice plans limited to the public schools than were participating parents. The nonparticipating subjects rated each one of these plans an average of 22 percentage points higher than participating subjects (see Table 11 for a rank ordered listing of restricted choice plans by group). Nonparticipating parents were substantially more likely than participating parents to select one of the restricted choice plans as their "most favored" option.

Table 11: Rank Ordered Listing Of Restricted Choice Plans

Participating	Nonparticipating
- magnet schools	- minischools
- minischools	- magnet schools
- choice-of-teacher programs	- choice-of-teacher programs

A low-moderate RACE effect was detected on the restricted choice scale, indicating that white subjects were more likely than nonwhite subjects to favor restricted school choice. White parents were substantially more in favor of magnet schools and choice-of-teacher programs than were nonwhite parents, whereas, nonwhite parents indicated a slightly greater preference for minischools than did white parents. White parents were almost two times more likely than nonwhite parents to select a restricted choice plan as their "most favored" option.

Unrestricted Choice Scale

A low-moderate GROUP effect was detected on the unrestricted choice scale, indicating that participating subjects were consistently more likely than nonparticipating subjects to favor

choice plans which would include both public and private schools. The participating subjects rated each one of these plans an average of 17 percentage points higher than nonparticipating subjects (see Table 12 for a rank ordered listing of unrestricted choice plans by group). Nonparticipating parents were twice as likely as participating parents to offer a "no opinion" response to the description of each unrestricted choice plan presented during the interview. The highest ranked unrestricted choice plan, tuition tax deductions, has been an option available to Minnesota parents since 1955; but less than 25% of the respondents interviewed were even aware of this fact. Participating parents were two times more likely than nonparticipating parents to select one an unrestricted choice plans as their "most favored" option.

Table 12: Rank Order Listing Of Unrestricted Choice Plans

Participating	Nonparticipating
- tuition tax deductions	- tuition tax deductions
- educational vouchers	- educational vouchers
- tuition tax credits	- tuition tax credits

A low-moderate RACE effect was detected on the unrestricted choice scale, indicating that nonwhite subjects were consistently more likely than white subjects to favor unrestricted school choice. Participating-white parents were more likely than participating-nonwhite parents to support tuition tax deductions and tuition tax credits. Essentially equivalent approval ratings were noted for tuition tax deductions for white and nonwhite subjects in the nonparticipating group, but nonwhite parents favored tuition tax credits at a slightly higher rate than their white counterparts.

The most striking difference observed between white and nonwhite parents for both

participating and nonparticipating groups was the approval ratings displayed for educational vouchers. Nonwhite parents consistently offered higher approval ratings for vouchers than white parents did within the sample. Among the nonparticipating group, nonwhite parents displayed a much greater propensity than white parents to select one of the unrestricted choice plans as their "most favored" option.

DISCUSSION

Minnesota parents are more fortunate than the majority of other parents in the United States for two reasons: (1) their children have access to one of the highest quality public education systems in the country (U.S. Department of Education Statistics, 1992), and (2) they can choose to enroll their children in any one of the 1,500 public elementary and secondary schools within the state, thereby having the ability to match their child's interests and abilities with a suitable academic program. A major finding of this study is that when parents are given an opportunity to choose the school for their children, they *do* choose. Virtually all of the parents surveyed reported that they preferred making the enrollment decision for their learners, rather than having this decision based on residency factors. This affirmation of school choice was not dependent on open enrollment participatory status, race, or parent level of education. Sample parents' fully support the *concept* of choice and recognize their responsibility *to choose*.

CONCLUSIONS

(1) *Minnesota parents are fully aware that open enrollment exists but were found to be generally unaware of the other features available under the Enrollment Options program.* The fact that close to 99% of Minnesota parents had chosen to continue their child's enrollment in their resident school at the time of this survey is considered to be more of a vote of confidence for

local public education than a passive or uninterested response to open enrollment. The low participation rate for the open enrollment does not appear to reflect any parental ignorance of the program. Nonparticipating parents consistently stated that they were aware of open enrollment and had seriously considered enrolling their children in a nonresident school, but *chose* not to.

Parental awareness of the other features of Minnesota's Enrollment Options program does appear to be a problem. This study's assessment of how parents acquire information about their enrollment options calls attention to the fact that not enough emphasis has been placed on soliciting the support of local churches, civic organizations, charitable associations, and social service agencies in "getting the word out" about enrollment options. It is likely that these institutions have the most influential contact with the poor and disadvantaged parents within the state, who to date, have relied almost exclusively on the media for their information. It is apparent from the data that the media has not publicized the *other* enrollment options as thoroughly as it has open enrollment. With the possible exception of the post secondary enrollment option, these other options appear to best serve low income, poorly educated parents, who have shown that they are *least* informed about these options. An old-fashioned, "grassroots" approach to reaching these parents is highly recommended.

The fact that participating parents were found to be more knowledgeable than nonparticipating parents regarding enrollment options is not surprising. Participating parents were simply more motivated to obtain information than nonparticipating parents. This situation is analogous to purchasing a new automobile: when a person is ready to buy, they begin by collecting information about the various makes, models, and features. Educational consumers are, in effect, no different than automobile purchasers. Both have come to the marketplace intent

on making a choice, but they must gather enough pertinent information so that they are able to choose wisely.

Unfortunately, participating parents consistently reported that acquiring specific information about open enrollment was not an easy task. This situation points out a major flaw in the design of school choice programming in Minnesota. Because the sole statutory responsibility for disseminating information to parents regarding their enrollment options rests with the resident school board, an unnecessary conflict of interest appears to be operating at the local community level. To carry the automobile analogy one step further, this practice is like asking a car dealer to recommend the vehicles in a competitor's showroom rather than his own. Clearly, it is not in the resident school principal's best interest to fully inform parents regarding the procedure for leaving his/her school, thereby suffering the loss of state funding generated by their children (state funding covers on average 55% of the cost for local public education). It is recommended that the Minnesota Department of Education take a more active role in disseminating enrollment option information to parents, and/or an independent Enrollment Options Assistance Bureau be created.

Even if, as the present study has shown, parents are aware that they have a right to choose the public schools for their children, but would have to run a bureaucratic gauntlet in implementing their choice, the open enrollment program is self-defeating and tends to eliminate parents with a low frustration tolerance. It's clear that the parents who would most profit from the nonresident enrollment of their children are the least likely to successfully navigate the open enrollment process (i.e. lower income and poorly educated parents). Problems associated with executing a choice of schools was not limited to just participating parents, approximately 30%

of the nonparticipating parents interviewed stated that they wanted assistance (counseling) in making the enrollment decision for their children.

Overall, white parents were found to be slightly better informed about their enrollment options than nonwhite parents, and parent level of education was shown to be positively correlated with *choice awareness*. A detailed review of the data, however, indicates that the effects of race, education, and participatory status were the most pronounced within a single study group. The nonparticipating-nonwhite-high school group was found to be very ill informed about enrollment options (see Table 5). An examination of the demographic statistics for this group shows that these parents are low-income (50% of respondents reporting family incomes between $10,000 - 20,000 per year), and poorly educated (71% verified non-high school graduates with a mean education level of 10.4). This groups also contained the highest proportion of rural residents (from communities with a median population of 1,170), and the second highest proportion of Native Americans (21%). It seems more than coincidental that this nonwhite-low income-poorly educated-predominantly rural population of parents also displayed the lowest scores on the *active choice* and *parent influence* scales and the highest *nonactive choice* scale scores within the sample. Additionally, these parents were shown to be the least satisfied with their resident school's educational program among all the nonparticipating subjects interviewed. The profile of scaled scores from this group gives this researcher the impression that these are "disenfranchised" parents, and further supports the finding that the parents who stand to benefit the most from enrollment options are the least likely to participate in the program.

(2) *Minnesota parents are "active" enrollment decision-makers regardless of whether they*

choose resident or nonresident schools for their children. The results obtained from the two dependent variables designed to measure parent enrollment decision-making behavior (active and nonactive choice scales) give ample reason for optimism regarding the future of school choice. Both participating and nonparticipating subjects scored well above 50 on the *active choice* scale and well below 50 on the *nonactive choice* scale. These findings may give the impression that parents in general are not "active choosers" of educational services; however, the scaled measurements tested for a large number of enrollment decision-making factors, and it would be unrealistic to expect that most parents would be influenced by them all.

Sample parents were quite heavily influence by the school factors which really count in an assessment of open enrollment. This study was designed to determine if parents, do in fact, consider school curriculum, academic standards, teacher quality, and school climate before making the enrollment decisions for their children; or to determine if they do *not*, as evidenced by an acceptance of the resident school simply because it is conveniently located. According to the subjects interviewed, parents choose the schools for their children based primarily on academic reasons. However, if parents view the schools in their geographic area as being academically equal, they will choose the most accessible school.

Even though participating parents rated academic factors more highly than convenience factors when making their enrollment decisions (in contrast to their nonparticipating counterparts), very few of the parents within the total sample appeared to automatically accept the resident school option for their learners. Although nonparticipating parents were heavily influenced by such factors as school location and the availability of transportation, the responses from this group showed serious consideration of school-related factors as well. Only about half

of the nonparticipating parents interviewed indicated that they sought to compare schools once open enrollment began. Since a substantial number of these parents reported that they had chosen their home community with the resident school's quality in mind, they were not motivated to later "shop around" for educational alternatives.

Parent level of education was found to be a factor in the enrollment decision-making behavior observed by this study. Parents educated at or below the high school level were influenced quite heavily by convenience factors, whereas parents with some college or a college degree were more likely to consider academic factors in making their enrollment decisions. Among the nonparticipating group, parents who had graduated from college were the most likely to have compared schools after open enrollment was initiated.

Ethnicity was found not to be a factor in enrollment decision-making, which appears to contradict the findings of previous research on school choice. Those findings indicated that less active choice behavior was observed among nonwhite parents than white parents (Darling-Hammond *et al*, 1985; Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Weiler, 1974). On the contrary, the nonwhite subjects interviewed in this study were found to be slightly more active in their enrollment decision-making behavior than their white counterparts were, but not enough to be statistically different. The low scores observed for the nonparticipating subjects, along with the very low scores observed for the participating subjects on the *nonactive choice* scale, demonstrate that most parents have definite attitudes and beliefs regarding school enrollment factors and in the concept of school choice in general. However, the education effect associated with nonactive choice does indicate that children from poorly educated families are the most likely to be left out of

participating in open enrollment simply because their parents have "no opinion" about the program.

(3) *"Neighborhood" and "convenience" effects were found to be significant factors as to why the majority of Minnesota parents choose not to use open enrollment.* Subjects from both participating and nonparticipating groups ranked "feelings of community affiliation/loyalty" among the uppermost reasons for continuing, or wanting to continue, their child's enrollment in the resident school. This finding is understandable because once a family has made the decision to reside in a particular community, many of the social benefits derived from neighborhood associations center around the local public school. The majority of nonparticipating parents interviewed were proud of their local communities and proud of their local public schools. Hence, this type of social identification with where one lives, or "neighborhood effect," makes it very difficult for a parent to leave the community in search of educational alternatives for their children.

Another strong impediment to participation in open enrollment, found among both participating and nonparticipating subjects, is the "negative impact on a child's social life" when a parent elects to enroll them in a nonresident school. It can be argued that the bonds of community affiliation are even stronger among children and adolescents than among adults; and it is very difficult for any student, regardless of their educational needs, to leave their contemporaries in the resident school. Overall, it is only under extreme circumstances or need that a parent can induce a child to leave the familiar social milieu of his/her resident school.

Lastly, the presence of the day-to-day practical issues related to sending a child to school cannot be overlooked. In most instances, the resident school enrollment option is simply the

most convenient for most parents. However, it is important to mention that 12% of participating parents enrolled their children in a nonresident school primarily because this school was closer to home than the resident school. As more and more of this country's households have both parents working (or are single parent households), having a school close to home can make the difference between a manageable and unmanageable family life style. Lack of transportation services was a primary reason why more nonparticipating parents did not consider open enrollment for their children, and it was among the biggest complaints reported by participating parents. Even though a key feature of open enrollment is the provision of free transportation services from the receiving school district's borders to the nonresident school, most parents (unless they are economically disadvantaged) must provide their own transportation to and from the receiving school district's borders. Better solutions to the transportation problems associated with interdistrict student transfers are needed if open enrollment is to be available to all parents, not just the ones who can deal with the inconvenience and expense associated with providing transportation. Transportation difficulties were also found to be a factor in the low participation rates in open enrollment programs in other states (Carnegie, 1992).

(4) *The majority of Minnesota parents are at least moderately satisfied with the quality of educational services provided by their resident schools, but parents who participate in open enrollment do so primarily because they are extremely dissatisfied with the educational services provided by their resident school.* The accolades received by Minnesota public schools from its parent constituency has already been reviewed, as has the social and economic impediments to interdistrict student transfers. What remains is discussion of the factors that motivate a parent to take advantage of the open enrollment option. Dissatisfaction with the educational services

and programs is most definitely at the hub of why parents leave their resident school in search of educational alternatives for their children. Although nonparticipating parents in general displayed only a moderate overall satisfaction ratings when asked to critically examine their resident school *in toto*, participating parents as a whole were very unhappy with everything about their resident school except for the physical plant. The scores obtained on the *satisfaction with resident school scale* for participating and nonparticipating subjects were more divergent than any other measurement employed in this study.

Both groups listed the resident school's academic standards and teaching staff among the factors they were least satisfied with, but participating subjects were clearly much less satisfied with these factors than were nonparticipating parents. The largest difference in satisfaction ratings were in "amount of individual attention offered to child" and "school administration." The two groups were diametrically opposed on these two items. It is apparent that most parents will overcome the natural obstacles to taking their child out of the resident school, and they will suffer the social and economic consequences of this decision if they have determined that their child's educational needs have not been met and negotiations with local school officials have failed. A good example of parent dissatisfaction with the resident school administration was seen in the mass exodus of students from one school district to a neighboring district during the 1989-90 school year.[8]

One finding which runs counter to the opinions expressed by school choice critics (that parents will use open enrollment to avoid racial desegregation), was that nonparticipating parents expressed a higher level of dissatisfaction with the resident school's ethnic/cultural student composition than the participating parents did. Although Minnesota may not be a fair test case

to determine whether or not parents will choose schools along racial and economic lines (because 92% of the population is white), the results from this investigation and the companion school administrator study (Tenbusch & Garet, 1993) do not give cause for concern regarding this potential misuse of school choice privileges.

Satisfaction with resident school programs was also found to be a function of race: white parents were generally more satisfied than nonwhite parents. Among the participating group of parents, nonwhite parents were shown to be only about a third as satisfied as their white counterparts with their resident school. Though participating parents were in general very dissatisfied with their resident school, the nonwhite parent satisfaction ratings were abysmal. It is clear from these results that minority parents have used open enrollment to gain access to better educational services for their children.

(5) *Minnesota parents have a greater degree of "influence" in their relations with school officials because of open enrollment, and they have more control over the type and scope of educational services received by their children.* Both participating and nonparticipating parents stated that since open enrollment began, school administrators have been more responsive to their wishes and demands. A substantial number of nonparticipating parents indicated that their resident school principal has been very accommodating in disputes and with suggestions in an effort to "get students to stay."

The results obtained from the *parent influence scale* indicate that a system-wide increase in "parent voice" has occurred as a result of open enrollment. All Minnesota parents, regardless of their open enrollment participatory status, race, or level of education now enjoy greater authority in asserting their desires regarding educational services. The results obtained from the

companion school administrator study (Tenbusch & Garet, 1993) confirm that principals are very interested in keeping parents happy under what they perceive to be the "threat of open enrollment." These findings strongly support the research conducted by other investigators, who observed an increase in parent influence as a consequence of school choice (Galluccio-Steele, 1986; Nault & Uchetelle, 1978; Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Weiler, 1974).

Even though a systemic change has occurred in the relationship between parents and school officials, participating parents viewed themselves as substantially more effectual in their dealings with school staff than were their nonparticipating counterparts. They were three times more likely to state that open enrollment had increased their influence. The greatest difference between the two groups centered around parent negotiation with school officials regarding the provision of specific educational services for their children. Participating parents were shown to be very effectual in getting the nonresident school to respond to those instructional needs. The fact that nonparticipating parents were found to be slightly more active in their PTA than participating parents since open enrollment began was a bit surprising, but it is possible that parents wishing to continue their child's enrollment in the resident school view the PTA as a "choice invigorated" organization and affords them an opportunity to become more involved in school affairs. Participating parents, on the other hand, appear to prefer a more individualized assertion of their influence with school officials.

There is reason to believe that the increase in parent influence observed in this study will diminish as school administrators become more experienced with open enrollment (Tenbusch & Garet, 1993). This was found to be true in Massachusetts's experience with open enrollment (Gallucio-Steele, 1986). However, as long as parents are provided the opportunity to choose the

public schools for their sons and daughters, parent influence in school affairs will be sustained at least moderate levels.

(6) *The level of parental interest in "restricted" and "unrestricted" school choice programs were found to be a function of open enrollment participatory status and race, but most parents reacted favorably to any plan increasing the amount of control they have over the provision of educational services to their children.* As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, how a sample of parents who have already been sensitized to school choice programs view other plans which are either in practice or have been proposed was of particular interest to this researcher. The results of the present study suggest that Minnesota parents generally would prefer to have even more choice than they do now.

Nonparticipating parents were shown to be consistently more interested in "restricted" school choice plans than were participating parents, which lends some support to a recent national study which found that most parents are interested in strengthening our country's public education system by limiting choice to public schools exclusively (Carnegie, 1992). The highest ranked restricted plan favored by participating parents was magnet schools, whereas, among nonparticipating parents, minischools were rated the highest. These rankings explain a great deal regarding the difference in choice preferences between the two groups.

Participating parent support for magnet schools was almost as high as that which was observed for nonparticipating parents. Magnet schools are viewed by participating parents as just another type of nonresident school, although more specialized in nature. The conceptual base for magnet schools appeals to most participating parents, who were shown to make their enrollment decisions based on the specific curriculum offerings available at nonresident schools.

These parents, by their very participation in open enrollment, are willing to overcome the natural impediments to choosing a nonresident school. Therefore, it is not surprising that they would consider magnet schools among the possibilities in making their enrollment decisions.

The fact that minischools were rated the highest among nonparticipating parents is also consistent with their demonstrated preference to continue their child's enrollment in the resident school. It would be more convenient for these parents to choose among several types of educational programs offered by their resident school, than forced to look outside their home school district in search of desirable educational services for their children. Nonparticipating parents represent the majority of Minnesota parents: they do not have much interest in leaving their resident school, but still have a strong interest in being offered a choice in educational programs. The development of minischools may be a further method for superintendents to prevent students from leaving their resident school districts. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has concluded that most of this country's parents would support the minischool concept of choice above all other plans (Carnegie, 1992).

Choice-of-teacher programs occupied the lowest rank of restricted choice plans. Both participating and nonparticipating parents favored the idea of being able to select their child's teacher but recognized the practical limitations of such a plan. Clearly, it would be impossible for every parent to select the best teacher in a given school. However, since it has been shown that the majority of parents who choose to use open enrollment do so because they were not satisfied with the amount of individual attention provided to their child in their resident school, the choice-of-teacher concept is worth exploring further. If parents were offered a change of teachers when learning problems develop with their child, they would be less likely to seek

nonresident school enrollment.

Participating parents were shown to be twice as interested as nonparticipating parents in school choice plans which would allow them to enroll their children in private schools at public expense. The unrestricted school choice plan receiving the most support from sample parents was tuition tax deductions. Strangely enough, this plan has been available to Minnesota parents for over 30 years, yet few seem to realize this fact. Educational vouchers received strong support from both participating and nonparticipating subjects, and was considered the second most desirable unrestricted choice plan. Tuition tax credits, which were more strongly supported by participating parents than nonparticipating parents, rated third.

The important difference in relation to open enrollment participatory status was that participating subjects were two times more likely than nonparticipating parents to rate one of the unrestricted plans as their "most favored." This is not surprising, since a high proportion of these parents had also considered enrolling their children in private schools before becoming involved in open enrollment. It may be that participating parents, having experienced a taste for school choice, can more readily envision a system where public and private schools are allowed to compete.

Probably the most significant finding regarding parental opinions of *other* school choice programming was the fact that nonwhite parents from both participating and nonparticipating groups were substantially more in favor of educational vouchers than were their white counterparts. This pattern of response gives this researcher the impression that nonwhite parents view private education as an even more attractive option for meeting the needs of their learners than open enrollment.

LIMITATIONS

An argument can be made that the comparison of participating and nonparticipating subjects in the present investigation is not as scientifically valid as a study which compared Minnesota parents participating in open enrollment to parents in a demographically equivalent, non-open enrollment state. Since all Minnesota parents have been exposed to conditions of school choice under open enrollment, the nonparticipating sample of subjects cannot be considered an experimental control group.

No attempt was made to measure how participation in open enrollment affected student achievement. However, virtually all participating parents interviewed in this investigation reported that they *believed* their children were doing better academically at the nonresident school, largely because of improved teacher-student relations and a better student attitude toward school.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

(1) A closer examination of how "parent Influence" in school affairs changes in relation to the local school principal's experience with open enrollment would be a valuable addition to the literature on school choice.

(2) An experimental study designed to determine what factors would motivate low income, poorly educated parents to become involved in school choice programs is needed.

(3) Continued research regarding the open enrollment program's impact on the ethnic and cultural diversity of schools needs to be conducted, and a determination made regarding the possibility of parents using the program to avoid racial desegregation.

(4) It would be useful to gather data from teachers concerning the change in their relations with

parents as a result of open enrollment, and determinge their perceptions regarding the degree of organizational change in their schools related to the program.

(5) To obtain more definitive estimates of the effects of open enrollment, it would be interesting to compare organizational features of schools in Minnesota with demographically similar schools in neighboring non-open enrollment state.

(6) Since open enrollment is supposed to cause improvements in the overall population of schools, it is not reasonable to look for open enrollment effects by comparing students who chose to move with those who don't. Instead, its necessary to compare students in open enrollment states with similar students in non-open enrollment states.

NOTES

[1]An answer to this research question requires that a distinction be made between "active" and "nonactive" choice behavior. A parent is considered to have engaged in *active choice behavior* if he/she has attempted to obtain information regarding open enrollment and has evaluated the practical, economic, social, and academic issues related to making an enrollment decision for his/her child(ren). Conversely, a parent is considered to have engaged in *nonactive choice behavior* if he/she has made no attempt to obtain/review information regarding open enrollment, has displayed no opinion regarding choice programs in general, and appears to have accepted, without deliberation, resident school enrollment for his/her child(ren).

[2]For a complete understanding of this study's experimental hypotheses, survey scale development, and a more detailed review of scaled responses the reader is directed to review "Parent Choice Behavior and School Organizational Change: A Study of Minnesota's Open Enrollment Program," a dissertation submitted by James P. Tenbusch, Northwestern University, School of Education & Social Policy, June 1992. This publication is available from University Microfilms Incorporated (UMI), Ann Arbor, Michigan.

[3]The proxy method of subject selection of participating subjects utilized a three step procedure. First, a computerized database was created containing over 300 MN cities and towns, with each city/town record coded by three demographic factors: *Geographic Code* (rural; suburban; and, urban), *Education Code* (% non-high school graduates; % high school graduates; % some college; and, % college graduates), and *Income Code* (low income; middle income;, and upper income). Coded information was drawn from the following sources: U.S.Census - Minnesota Population & Labor Statistics (1980), Minnesota Population & Household Estimates (1987), and

Minnesota Data Map Directory (1988). Second, a computer sort of MN city/towns was then performed using demographic search terms. The resultant output of this computer selection procedure was a listing of cities for each cell. For example, in obtaining a listing of the cities from which a group of high school graduate parents could be drawn, the computer was instructed to select the records of only those cities/towns containing over 65% adult high school graduate population but under 10% college graduate population. This procedure was used in creating an eligible subject list of over 800 names and phone numbers from the original 3,800 parent records contained in the MN Department of Education's open enrollment database. Of the 800 names selected, 50% were white parents and 50% were nonwhite parents. Care was taken to control for variations in family income and geographic location by selecting approximately equal numbers of eligible subjects from cities with high proportions of low, middle, and upper income families from rural, suburban, and urban areas. Third, a random sample of the final list of 36 subjects for each group was drawn from approximately 100 names contained in the eligible subject list for each cell.

[4]The principals surveyed in the school administrator study were asked to randomly select the names and phone numbers of eight (8) parent subjects from their school records; one subject selected to each of the following categories: (1) white-non-high school graduate, (2) white-high school graduate, (3) white-some college, (4) white-college graduate, (5) nonwhite-non-high school graduate, (6) nonwhite-high school graduate, (7) nonwhite-some college, and (8) nonwhite-college graduate.

[5]Half of the survey scales employed a coding scheme which made it impossible for a subject to receive a raw score below zero, because each item has a possible value of: 0, 1; 0, 1, 2; or 0, 1, 2, 3. The raw scores of each of the survey scales were transformed into an interval measurement calibrated from 0 to 100 by taking the sum of each subject's score divided by the total possible score multiplied by 100. The use of a 100 point scaling method offers a convenient way to interpret results in relative percentile rank terms and accommodates the use of understandable value labels such as low, moderate, high. However, the other half of the scales used included some number of Guttman type items which were coded as -1, 0, +1, making it possible for a subject to receive a raw score below zero. The calibration of these scales are extended, and range from some number less than zero to 100. For example, the *satisfaction with resident school scale* used exclusively Guttman items which created an interval measurement calibrated from -100 to +100.

[6]A number of preliminary tests were conducted on the data to determine if the MANOVA assumptions were met, which they were. These tests included: homogeneity of dispersion matrices, Bartlett test of sphericity, and stem-leaf plots. Analysis of the intercorrelation matrix of survey scales (Pearson coefficients) revealed low to moderate degree of association between dependent measurements, which confirmed that each scale was measuring distinct factors.

[7]The *active choice scale* used discrete type questions which were answered as "yes" or "no." Any "no" response to a question was coded as: 0. However, a "yes" answer to a *convenience type* question was coded as: 1, and a "yes" response to a school related or *academic type*

question was coded as: 2. This coding scheme provided additional weight to the raw scores of parents who were the most likely to base their enrollment decision on academic factors.

[8]At the beginning of the 1989-90 school year over 300 students from the Iron-Buhl school district applied for transfers to the neighboring Virginia school district. This mass exudos was prompted by the negative parental response to a decision made by the Iron-Buhl school board to close its high school building and transfer all its students to their junior high building. As a direct result of this immenent loss of student the school board resinded its decision and re-openned the high school building. However, 158 students still left the Iron-Buhl school district and 150 of these students were admitted to the Virginia school district via open enrollment.

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APPENDIX A: MINNESOTA ENROLLMENT OPTIONS PROGRAM

Minnesota Department of Education Definitions

OPEN ENROLLMENT: Students entering kindergarten through grade 12 may choose to enroll in a school or program located in a district other than the one in which the pupil lives.

POST SECONDARY ENROLLMENT OPTION: An option available to 11th and 12th grade students which allow these students to attend a college of technical institute, either full- or part-time, at no cost to the student. Students can choose to take post secondary courses for either high school or college/technical institution credit.

APPENDIX A: MINNESOTA ENROLLMENT OPTIONS PROGRAM (Continued)

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION INCENTIVES PROGRAM: Persons who wish to finish high school have an opportunity to earn a high school diploma by choosing from a variety of programs funded by the State of Minnesota.

Persons age 12 to 21 may apply in:
- any public school, or
- a private (nonsectarian) school having a contract with a public school district to provide services under this law, or
- a approved public alternative education program, or
- an Area Learning Center, or
- a college or technical institute under Post Secondary Enrollment Options, if the student has reached at least the 11th grade level and meets the requirements of the post secondary institution.

Persons 21 and over may attend:
- approved Area Learning Center,
- approved alternative program,
- high school if that school board passes a resolution approving students 21 and over,
- eligible adult basic education programs under community education program,
- post-secondary enrollment options program if eligible.

AREA LEARNING CENTERS: An option available to students participating in the High School Graduation Incentives Program or Open Enrollment Program. Those who wish to finish high school in an alternative education setting, where the program is designed to meet the individual needs of the learning, may enroll in an Area Learning Center.

Individualized programs are developed to fit a student's specific needs, which may include:
- academic and learning skill classes taught using alternative methods.
- trade and vocational skill training.
- work experience.
- transition services which help students obtain resources in education or employment.

PREGNANT MINOR/MINOR PARENT PROGRAM: Eligible student may choose from any educational program opportunities which leads to a high school diploma. These include but are not limited to:
- Regular educational program opportunities and necessary supportive services made available through the resident school district.
- High School Graduation Incentives at any public school, approved private (nonsectarian) school, public alternative education program, Area Learning Center, or college or technical institute.

APPENDIX B: RESTRICTED AND UNRESTRICTED CHOICE PLANS (Descriptions)

Taken Directly From Survey Instrument

Interviewer Script: I would like to know what you think about a variety of *other* school choice programs which are either in practice today or have been proposed. Please tell me if you *approve, disapprove* or have *no opinion* about each one of the school choice plans I'm about to read to you. **Do you approve, disapprove, or have no opinion regarding ...?**

TUITION TAX DEDUCTIONS: Which allows you to claim a portion of you children's education expenses as a *deduction* from your *state* income taxes, even if your children are enrolled in private schools.

TUITION TAX CREDITS: Which allows you a tax credit for each of your children enrolled in a private school. The credit is equal to the tuition paid to the private school (up to a maximum amount of $2,000 per child). This directly reduces the amount of income tax you pay.

EDUCATIONAL VOUCHERS: Which provides you an expense voucher equal to the average amount of money spent in the state for educating a student in the public schools. The voucher can be cashed in at either a public or private school of your choice.

MAGNET SCHOOLS: Which offers you an opportunity to enroll your children in schools which offer unique and distinctive curriculums designed to motivate students in particular academic subjects.

MINISCHOOLS: Which offers your children a selection from a number of different types of curriculums (or courses of study) all within the local public school.

CHOICE-OF-TEACHER: Which allows you to select the teacher(s) your children will receive from one year to the next.